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II.—STATE CHILD LABOR RELIEF

By M. EDITH CAMPBELL,
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The Ohio Child Labor Law has a supplemental provision, known as the Child Labor Relief Law (Section 7777—General Code). It provides that when a truant officer is satisfied that a child, compelled to attend school by the provisions of the act, is unable to do so, because absolutely required to work in order to support itself, or help to support others legally entitled to its services, and the truant officer shall report the case to the president of the board of education, it shall be the duty of said president to furnish text-books free of charge, and such other relief as may be necessary to enable the child to attend school for the required time each year; the expenses incident to be paid from the contingent funds of the school district. Such child shall not be considered or declared a pauper by reason of the acceptance of this relief. In case the child or its parents or guardian, refuse or neglect to take advantage of the provisions thus made for its instruction, the child may be committed to a children's home or a juvenile reformatory.

Unfortunately I did not know of my part in this program in time to secure later information than was obtained a year ago. This information was secured by Mr. Clopper, who sent an inquiry to the boards of education in a number of Ohio cities, concerning the operation of the law.

Its Operation

It was found that the larger cities had done something toward giving relief, in the way of clothing, shoes, eye-glasses and textbooks, but Toledo showed a very interesting situation: They were giving scholarships amounting to two dollars a week, and six children were virtually being kept in school through them. Other relief was also being given. One child was provided with carfare

in order to go to school; two or three children were furnished breakfast. Toledo is evidently giving the law a fair trial.

In Cincinnati, since September 1st, we have also been giving this material relief in money, while previously the law had operated as in the other cities—not giving monetary relief. More than a thousand dollars, however, had been expended under this law in clothing, books, and eye-glasses, disbursed through the associated charities. When a child applied for an age and schooling certificate, and because of its age was prevented by the state from working, if the mother were found in positive need of the child's assistance, the case was reported to the charities for investigation. If the investigation disclosed need, the charities furnished the relief, sending the bills for such relief to the board of education.

Since September 1st, however, the matter has been entirely handled by the chief truant officer, and the board of education has given out \$300 in scholarships of \$1 or \$2 a week. I have not been able to discover, however, any particular interest in the law on the part of the officials concerned. Neither has the system of investigation been perfected. The truant officer expressed the hope that the law would not become widely known, as in times past such relief had caused only pauperization and idleness. He also felt that the board of education could not assume the burden of investigation of a large number of cases. My suggestion that the associated charities and other agencies would gladly assist was not enthusiastically received.

A law similar to that in Ohio is in operation in Oklahoma, which definitely provides for the furnishing of relief in money.¹

Tentative Results

It may be too soon to expect results from the operation of this law in Ohio, or any but the most meager and inaccurate information. We may, however, note one or two tentative results:

1st. Evidently there have not been many applications for assistance by mothers of children under fourteen years of age. We trust this may be due to the fact that the number of families for whom the necessity of child labor is a pressing one, is not large. This situation, however, may also be due to the desire of boards of

¹In April, 1911, Michigan passed a law providing relief for families in which premature child labor would otherwise be necessary, specifying relief should not exceed \$3.00 a week per child or \$6.00 a week per family.

education "to keep the law quiet," or of the unconscious stigma of "charity" which is placed upon accepting relief.

2d. Fear of pauperizing the child or the parent, rather than the spirit of investigation and experimentation, is at present the attitude of boards of education.

We realize that the power of boards of education in this matter is limited by the vexatious and sometimes seemingly insoluble problem of taxation. For instance, in Cincinnati, Superintendent Dyer, whose great interest in the training of the industrial child is widely known, is facing the reduction of school funds. This may mean for Cincinnati a curtailment of the continuation school system, a lowering of teachers' salaries, or other much to be deplored limitations of a well planned school system. Demands upon the contingent fund for pensions or scholarships will, of course, increase this problem of adequate financial support for present experiments. But the financing of industrial courses, of co-operative and continuation schools might mean the diminishing of funds for high schools. Yet we do not hesitate to establish schools and classes for the child who must be a wage-earner. Perhaps the child who is poorly nourished, inadequately housed, and improperly cared for, who must be considered not as an individual but as "a member of a group," needs the attention of educators, and of the state, as much as the "industrial" or the "high school" child. There is certainly an unusual opportunity for a wide and helpful knowledge to be gained through this Ohio law concerning this child and its difficulties.

As suggested, the expenses to the board of education of the necessary investigation could be obviated by the assistance of such an agency as the associated charities. The most thorough investigation would of course be necessary, for we realize only too keenly the evil of giving material relief without a constructive policy for the formation of character. As Miss Breckinridge writes²: "The task of the relief agency, whether public or private, in dealing with the family group, is the extremely difficult one of furnishing the pecuniary or material resources in such a way as to build up the spiritual well-being, and above all, the spirit of independence and of endeavor of the children." We certainly cannot develop "a comprehensive program of preventive relief administration," unless

²Widowhood in the Juvenile Court. Reprint from "American Journal of Sociology," July, 1910.

every advantage is taken of such an opportunity as is afforded by a relief law.

Educational vs. Monetary Scholarships

The text of the law clearly states that the child who benefits thereby shall not be considered a pauper. Nevertheless, an indefinable stigma rests upon pecuniary relief, and the women for whom it is intended do not apply for assistance. This stigma can be removed if the funds are handled as scholarship funds. Either the psychological effect of the name of such funds or the method of their management frees them from the stigma. Government scholarships are regarded only as an honor, an interesting example of which we find in Porto Rico. That government has provided forty-five scholarships, enabling children and youths of inadequate means to study in the United States. Twenty of these are for college training, \$500 a year each; twenty-five in institutions such as Hampton or Tuskegee, \$250 a year each. College scholarships are also given and received as a mark of honor, and my own acquaintance with private scholarship funds strengthens the conviction that pecuniary assistance can be given without breaking down the self-respect of the recipient. The state extends to the child education from the kindergarten to the university, without even inferring that the publicly educated child is a pauper. Why, therefore, cannot the state bestow upon the child education in the form of monetary scholarships? One dollar or two dollars a week may mean securing for the child the greatest of all "educations," the care and guidance of an intelligent mother, and the beneficial influence of the home. Why, therefore, in this form of education should the mark of honor be lost and the stigma of "charity" become apparent?

The fear of pauperization is always with us. This fear, however, does not prevent the state from making lavish expenditures upon the child through channels of education and of institutional care, but it does prevent the state from rendering assistance to the individual child or mother, and this often defeats the great end for both education and government—the preservation of the home. We are so eternally concerned over the one or two mothers who did not deserve help and are consequently catalogued as "failures," that we are quite willing to allow the eight deserving mothers to die of

overwork and starvation; secretly consoling ourselves with the knowledge that state institutions will rear the orphaned children. We know the institutional expenditure will be much greater than the individual expenditure would have been, but we have at least not encouraged idleness and dependence! In her address before the last conference of charities and correction, Miss Addams presented this need for state care with her own clearness of vision and irrefutable logic. In the reprint by Miss Breckinridge referred to, and in a number of recent studies by Miss Breckinridge and Miss Abbott, the truth is forcefully demonstrated. The minority report of the poor law commission, makes the following recommendation: *“That for widows or other mothers in distress, having the care of young children, residing in homes not below the national minimum of sanitation, and being themselves not adjudged unworthy to have children entrusted to them, there should be adequate home aliment on condition of their devoting their whole time and energy to the care of the children.”

The Ohio Child Labor Relief Law would seem to offer a fair chance for the refutation or the confirmation of these recommendations and statements. If boards of education are fearful of informing the child or parent, perhaps it would not be giving the law too “wide” a propagation to inform public school teachers of its existence. Much valuable information and data could be secured in this way without expense. They are now not cognizant of the law’s existence, and day after day they see a bright, interesting pupil fail in physical and mental strength because of burdens too heavy for childish shoulders—burdens resting there by virtue of the state’s refusal to grant “adequate home aliment” for mothers “not adjudged unworthy.” A tragic tale of such a defeated thirteen-year-old girl, has just been left on my desk by a teacher who, had she known of this law, could have saved the child.

A tremendous opportunity has been given the boards of education in Ohio to become pioneers in the work of preserving for the child, home care and influence. If they have the wisdom and the vision fearlessly to allow their relief law a reasonable and fair operation, they will lay the foundation stone for not only a system of education that extends from the university to the kindergarten, but one which protects and nourishes the great underlying power for the “spiritual well-being” of the child—the mother in the home.

* See *Widowhood in the Juvenile Court*, S. P. Breckinbridge.